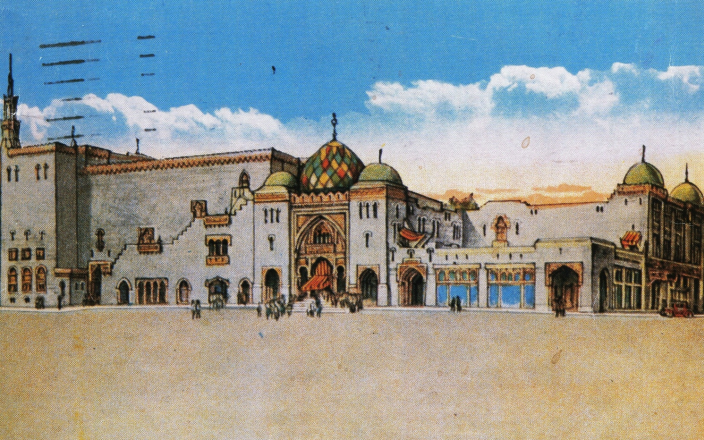




Yaarab Temple and the Fox Theatre: The Survival of a Dream

THE GROWTH OF A
LOCAL FRATERNAL
ORGANIZATION LED
TO THE CREATION OF
ONE OF ATLANTA'S
BEST-KNOWN
VENUES.

There are few buildings in the Atlanta skyline more distinctive or more easily recognized than the Fox Theatre, with its Middle Eastern architectural lines and decorative motifs. Yet very few who visit or view the building are aware of the structure's history or origins. This article explores the theatre's connections to Yaarab Temple of Atlanta, a local Shriner organization whose membership conceived of, constructed, and first occupied this historic building in the late 1920s.

The beginnings of Yaarab Temple can be traced to December 8, 1889, when thirty-two Knights Templars and Scottish Rite Masons gathered in the office of insurance executive Henry Clay Stockdell to take the oath of the Ancient Arabic Order of the Nobles of the Mystic Shrine (A.A.O.N.M.S.)—a fraternal organization that had been founded in New York City seventeen years earlier. The result of this meeting was the establishment of Yaarab Temple of Atlanta, with Stockdell as the local Shrine's first "potentate," or highest ranking officer.

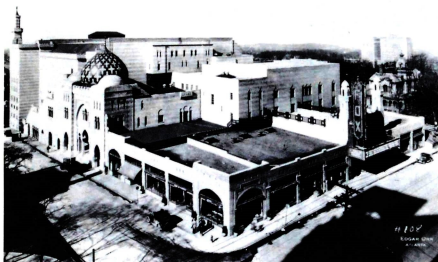
During the next two decades, the prestige and membership of Yaarab Temple continued to grow; by 1911, the Shrine's membership had grown too large to continue meeting comfortably in the Masonic Temple on the northwest corner of Peachtree and Cain (now International Boulevard) Streets. A committee was appointed in November of that year to consider building a new meeting hall, but the project was shelved when committee members decided that the organization could not afford the construction costs.¹

The dream of building a new mosque for the Shrine did not die, however, and eight years later, the proposal was revisited.

World War I had proven to be a period of tremendous growth for Yaarab Temple as thousands of Atlantans, including a number of the city's most prominent business, government, and civic leaders, joined the fraternal organization. In 1919, with membership at 4,032 (after a phenomenal one-year increase of 1,119 members) a committee again formed, this time to purchase property on which to construct a mosque. Two lots, on Ivy and Baker Streets, were purchased by the Yaarab Temple Building Company as possible sites for the mosque.²

Three years later Yaarab Temple deeded these lots and purchased instead some property valued at \$225,000 on the northwest corner of Peachtree and Kimball (now Ponce de Leon Avenue) Streets—the present site of the Fox Theatre. In 1924, Yaarab Temple made its last payment on the property, and plans for the construction of the mosque began again in earnest.³

The Shriners met on May 18, 1925, in Atlanta's Lyric Theatre⁴ at Carnegie Way and Cone Street to discuss the procedure for building their mosque. Attorney and long-time Shriner William A. Fuller, a member of the divan, or governing body,



Birds-eye view of the Fox Theatre, ca. 1929. Seen from the exterior, the building was designed to resemble a walled Moorish village.

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Henry Heinz, potentate of the Yaarab Temple, 1920. It was Heinz who stressed the importance of including a theatre large enough to accommodate non-Shrine functions.

Courtesy Yaarab Temple

advocated immediate construction. Former Potentate Henry Heinz (son-in-law of Coca-Cola Company founder Asa Griggs Candler) advocated moving more cautiously and stressed the importance of including in the building plans an auditorium or theatre large enough to accommodate non-Shrine functions, such as concerts and plays. If Yaarab Temple failed to build such an auditorium, Heinz argued, some other private club would certainly come along and seize the opportunity.⁵

The majority of Shriners agreed with Heinz that the project needed to proceed cautiously, and Potentate Charles Augustus Bowen appointed a ways-and-means committee to develop plans and funding sources for the mosque. On October 1, 1925, the committee formally launched a building fund campaign to raise one million dollars—their first estimate of construction costs. Though no final architect had been chosen for the project and complete construction plans were yet to be drawn, General Chairman Albert “Bert” S. Adams (a real estate executive with Adams-Cates Company) released a promotional brochure, *The Magic of Work Well Done*, which was filled with descriptions and sketches of buildings and rooms that had not yet been designed—and would never be constructed.

Bert Adams also made an emotional appeal to Yaarab Temple members to support the project. “Yaarab Temple, in all her lifetime of thirty-six years, has never

had a home,” he reminded them. “Today, as you know, we have launched a project to build a magnificent Shrine Mosque and Civic Auditorium . . .” and he called on all Shriners to become subscribers to the effort. “Your loan to the building fund will be made in the form of a pledge, which you will have two full years in which to pay, in semi-annual, annual, or quarterly installments, as you may desire.” Upon full payment of the pledge, Adams explained, Yaarab Temple would issue the contributor a Beneficial Loan Certificate, which would be secured by group insurance and a sinking fund.⁶

The preliminary design plans for the mosque, according to the fund-raising brochure, called for “a dignified structure of limestone, designed in Moorish architecture that will be in perfect accord with the heraldry and symbolism of the Shrine.”⁷ There were to be two entrances—one for the general public opening directly into the auditorium section of the mosque from Kimball Street, and one for Shriners and their guests on Peachtree Street. (These entrances were later reversed as a result of negotiations with Fox Theatres Corporation.) The proposed auditorium was intended to seat five to six thousand people and would be available for public and semi-public use when not in use by Yaarab Temple. Such a facility, the brochure emphasized, “will be able to provide a considerable source of revenue for the maintenance of the structure.”⁸

The importance of the auditorium was also stressed in a 1925 edition of *The City Builder*, an Atlanta Chamber of Commerce publication:

The feature of the building is, of course, the big Civic Auditorium, which is to seat approximately 7,500. This auditorium will serve the needs of Atlanta and the Shrine. Special arrangements are to make it fit for grand opera, light opera, theatrical and musical attractions, concerts, mass meetings, or any civic or municipal gathering. In design it is to resemble the most modern theatre construction, being beautifully decorated and comfortably



The divan, or governing board of the Yaarab Temple, 1926–28. Shown are, top, left to right: George E. Argard, recorder; Hiram R. Romans, oriental guide; Dewald A. Cohen, high priest and prophet; and James S. Floyd, treasurer. Bottom, left to right: W. Frank Luckiesh, chief rabban; Thomas C. Law, potentate; and Richard N. Fickett Jr., assistant rabban.

Courtesy Yaarab Temple

appointed. . . . No Shrine mosque anywhere in America will have finer accommodations for its members than the one Yaarab Temple is going to build. The entire wing of the structure on the Peachtree Street side will be devoted to spacious club and lounge rooms and the Recorder's office. In this portion there will also be a writing room, reading room and library, billiard room, cloak room, check room, cigar stand, card room, and possibly a buffet.⁹

Soundproof practice rooms and storage space for Yaarab Temple's uniformed parade units—their march-playing Million Dollar Band, their percussion and kazoo-playing Oriental Band, their ceremonial-singing Chanters, their precision-drill marching Patrol, and their ceremonial and ritual Degree Team—were also planned for the building.¹⁰

The Shrine's million-dollar building campaign closed on October 26, 1925 (twenty-five days after it began), with a victory dinner for four hundred Shriners and citizen workers on the roof garden of the Ansley Hotel.¹¹ The victory celebration, as it turned out, was premature, as construction costs for the mosque had been greatly underestimated. (The actual cost for construction, including the Fox Theatre auditorium, would climb to \$2,228,670.50 and furnishings in the auditorium would tally an additional \$261,216.¹²) The roof-top celebration also represented Bert Adams's last involve-

ment in the project; he fell ill during the fall of 1926 and died in early 1927.

Yaarab Temple's success in raising the first million dollars, however, did allow the organization to proceed with the project, and on November 23, 1925, Potentate Charles Bowen and the divan broke ground for the new mosque. A month later Bowen was named permanent chairman of the building committee and the committee was given a free hand in all matters pertaining to construction and selection of architects.¹³

In March 1926, the leadership again voted to vest the Shrine Mosque property in a non-capital stock holding corporation, as they had in 1919 when they purchased the Baker and Ivy Streets properties. Attorneys were instructed to secure a charter for Yaarab Temple Building Company, the legal owner of all Shrine property. William Fuller was named attorney for the corporation,¹⁴ which was administered by a board of trustees appointed on a three-year rotating basis.¹⁵

At a special August 2, 1926, meeting, additional steps were taken towards construction. The Building Company was authorized to purchase two additional parcels of land adjoining the mosque site: one running from Peachtree to Cypress Streets, and the other at the northeast corner of Kimball and Cypress Streets. Nichols Contracting Company was engaged to excavate the building site.¹⁶

The following year, a local architectural firm, Marye, Alger, and Vinour, was selected to design the mosque. While the firm had been in partnership for only a year, the architects were already well known in the local community and two of the principals had close connections to Yaarab Temple.¹⁷ Thornton Marye, a Shriner of Yaarab Temple since May 1917, had designed Atlanta's Spanish-style Terminal Station in 1904 and was the supervising architect for the Capital City Club in 1911. Richard W. Alger, like Marye, was an architect and a Shriner and had transferred his membership to Yaarab Temple from Chattanooga, Tennessee, in May 1927. Oliver J. Vinour, a native of France who had been trained at the École des

Cover from *The Magic of Work Well Done*, a promotional brochure for the building of the Shrine Mosque and civic auditorium, 1926. The brochure was filled with descriptions and sketches of buildings, such as this one, that would never be constructed.

Courtesy Yaarab Temple



Beaux-Arts in Paris, was not a Shriner, but had already achieved local distinction as the designer of the exterior of the Telephone Building at 51 Ivy Street.

It is difficult to say for certain which of the three partners actually designed the mosque, but the most likely candidate appears to have been Vinour, the French-trained architect. According to a 1974 article in the *Atlanta Journal/Constitution Magazine* by Henry Woodhead, Vinour "consulted a couple of picture books entitled *Nubia* and *The Holy Land* and some fifty postcards a friend had brought back from a world tour" for design ideas.¹⁸ Although Woodhead failed to identify the source of his information, Vinour's daughter, Lydia V. Miller of Bergenfield, New Jersey, confirmed her father's role in a follow-up letter to the newspaper in which she recalled that her father also used Atlanta's Carnegie Library and other local sources in drawing his plans for the Shrine Mosque and Auditorium. "I have in my home today a print of a patio within the Alhambra that dates from the time he was working on the Fox," she wrote.¹⁹ Vinour's principal role was also confirmed years later by Architect Preston S. Stevens: "Mr. Vinour, one of his [architect Marye's] partners, was his chief designer. The Fox Theatre was a Vinour design."²⁰

The resulting design drew upon traditional elements of Middle Eastern architecture and ornamentation for both the exterior and interior of the building. "Having its roots and traditions in Arabia," architect Marye later recalled, "we thought it most appropriate to make both the [shrine's] exterior and interior express the architecture recalled by pilgrims of the Orient in their journeys to Mecca." The one-storied shops, Marye explained, were meant to suggest a wall-enclosed court that one entered through a turreted gateway. "The spacious arcade entrance lobby sided by shops is made to imitate an eastern bazaar," he continued. Seen from a distance, the entire exterior resembled a walled Moorish village, with buildings and turrets rising from within, peaked with minarets.

The interior of the theatre, according to Marye, resembled a group of buildings connected by open courts, an illusion that was achieved by the use of sky-like ceilings flanked by arcades of masonry.

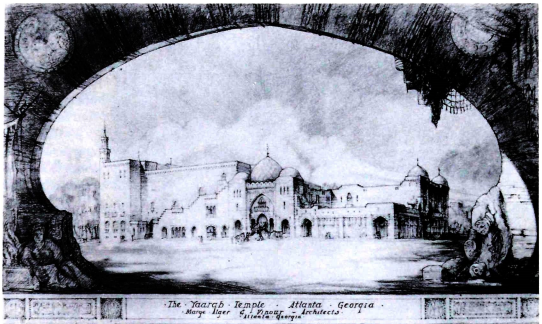
The largest of these courts is the auditorium of the theatre. The castellated sidewalls of stones are connected by an arched masonry bridge, forming the stage proscenium. Projecting from the rear wall is a protecting tent-like awning. The constructing of this in plaster to simulate woven materials was one of our many difficult problems. The open air illusion is largely secured by the depth of decor in the sky, correct stellar grouping and studied shifting cloud effects. The ornamentation necessary to relieve the somberness of mass masonry was secured by introducing burnished metal grills and screens and by candled light effects. To give interest and harmonious variety to the many lounges, rest rooms, and foyers, we introduced the forms, details, ornamentation, and furnishings derived from the architecture of Egypt, Turkey, Persia, and Morocco.²¹

Egyptian influence was especially evident in the banquet hall (or Egyptian Ballroom as it is now known). "The banquet hall, with its Egyptian columns and

Architectural drawing of mosque exterior, Marye, Alger, and Vinour, 1928.

It was likely the French-schooled Vinour who actually designed the mosque.

Atlanta History Center



ornaments of winged serpents, and scarabs," Marye noted, "is the architect's conception of the throne room of some Pharaoh." Egyptian form and detail was also reflected in designs for two of the restrooms.

The restrooms on the mezzanine level, by way of contrast, were designed to suggest a Turkish coffee room with "round wood-beamed ceiling, fireplace, and floor of colored tile," while the ladies' room with built-in dressing tables, divans and upholstered chairs inspired the "languid feeling enjoyed by the ladies of the harem." The carpets, upholstery, furniture, hardware, and indirect lighting fixtures of gold and colored glass in each of the lounges and restrooms were of special design, featuring colors in harmony with the particular architectural style of that individual room.²²

As these descriptions suggest, there was a high degree of complexity and detail in these design plans. According to Marye, the sheer number of architectural styles utilized and the ornateness of the environments necessitated full-size drawings and in many instances working plaster models from which the hundreds of details in marble, wood, metal, and plaster could be executed. "The preparation of these drawings, etc.," he noted, "occupied not less than thirty draftsmen and engravers

over a period of many months."²³

In the spring of 1927, while this design process was underway, Yaarab Temple began negotiations with Fox Theatres Corporation over a long-term lease agreement for the proposed auditorium. Fox Corporation Vice-President Saul E. Rogers recognized the advantages of locating a Fox theatre in Atlanta, but it would be another year before a suitable contract could be worked out between the two parties.²⁴

In the meantime, the Shriners approved a building contract with C. A. D. Bayley Company in December 1927, and construction crews were readied to begin work.²⁵ A month later, however, the trustees reported that general plans for improving the property as prepared by their architects would involve a greater sum than they had on hand, and plans were therefore revised "downward" to an amount the Yaarab Temple Building Company could afford. The new plans called for construction of two building projects: the auditorium and the "Shrine activities building" (including stores on Peachtree Street). This second structure could be built, according to the report, "within the Temple's present means and possibly without placing any loan or mortgage."²⁶

The trustees were hesitant to proceed with the auditorium without an assured



Construction of the Yaarab Temple on Peachtree Street at Ponce de Leon Avenue (formerly Kimball Street) May 23, 1928. From the program of the cornerstone laying of the Yaarab Temple's new mosque.

Courtesy Yaarab Temple

source of income, and towards that end, negotiations with Fox Theatres Corporation were stepped up. "If the lease [with Fox] is consummated," the Yaarab Temple Recorder wrote, "the income from the auditorium will be sufficient to enable the trustees to borrow enough money on that part of the property to build the second unit [activities building] as well. If the lease is not consummated, another lease plan is under consideration to guarantee income."²⁷

In January 1928, the contract with Fox Theatres Corporation was finally signed "guaranteeing" the necessary income, and Potentate Tom Law announced that construction would commence "just as soon as the plans and specifications can be changed to suit requirements of the contract."²⁸ While Fox did not contribute any money to the construction of the building and insisted on having the auditorium modified and furnished to their specifications, the lease agreement did allow Yaarab Temple to continue with the project.

The contract with Fox Theatres Corporation covered a lease period of twenty-one years, during which time the Yaarab Temple Building Company was to receive annual rental for the auditorium plus income from retail businesses fronting

Peachtree Street. The estimated amount of this income was about \$3 million.

Buoyed by the prospects of such a return, the trustees decided "to complete both sections of the Mosque in one building operation at an approximate cost of \$2 million for construction and furnishings."²⁹

For his part in the project, William Fox and his Corporation promised to accommodate Atlanta audiences, not only with movies but with stage shows as well:

We will give Atlanta whatever it wants in the way of entertainment. If Atlanta wants Roxy [the prize variety theatre in which Fox had acquired a controlling interest in 1927] presentations, they will be produced in the same elaborate fashion that characterizes them in New York. If it's vaudeville and high type pictures that are desired by the Atlanta public, we will give them the best. Our purpose is to present the highest class of entertainment in the splendid new theatre and to satisfy Atlanta patrons in every particular.³⁰

Reassured by the Fox Corporation's commitment to the auditorium and its plans for entertainment, Hiram Romans prophesied in March of 1928 that "the sound financial basis that attends its construction program removes any possibility of difficulties to delay the work or embarrassment later on through inability to care for the upkeep of the Mosque."³¹

Further predictions of success and profit attended cornerstone ceremonies for the mosque on June 14, 1928. Shriners and their families, together with visiting dignitaries, gathered on Peachtree Street and Ponce de Leon Avenue where the mosque foundation had been poured, and formally laid the cornerstone with appropriate Masonic rituals. F. Raymund Daniel, a newspaper man and head of all Masons in Georgia, officiated at the brief ceremony.³² The printed program for the cornerstone ceremony predicted that the mosque site "in a few years will undoubtedly be the center of every activity in Atlanta."

Construction continued during the summer of 1928, and the shops fronting

Peachtree Street were ready for occupancy in the fall.³³ But in October, the trustees called a special session at the Ansley Hotel Roof Garden to warn members of another critical financial shortage. Trustee Chairman Henry Heinz informed members that business transactions related to the architectural design of the auditorium and mosque, as well as to the construction of shops facing Peachtree Street, had depleted Building Company funds. A bond issue in the amount of a million-and-a-half dollars was now necessary to continue the project. Temple attorney William Fuller then discussed the legal transactions regarding the bond issue, and supervising engineer Joseph Shaw (also a member of Yaarab Temple) outlined the modified mosque and auditorium plans that he and the architects had prepared. Shriners in attendance approved the proposed plans and expressed their thanks for the actions of the trustees and Shaw.³⁴

The major changes in the design plans that Shaw presented were on the Peachtree Street side of the structure. "The Temple, as it will be built, will follow closely the original design, adapted to suit changing needs," architect Richard Alger noted, "except for the Peachtree frontage, which will have temporary stores instead of the original three-story building." According to these revised plans, the Peachtree Street frontage would include stores and a Shrine office on the first floor, "with a magnificent arcade leading to the auditorium." Above the stores would be a banquet hall and ballroom, quarters for the uniformed parade units, and ample kitchen facilities.³⁵

In addition to the interesting architectural and design elements discussed earlier, the proposed auditorium also featured a number of technological innovations that added to the structure's versatility. The stage in the auditorium, for example, was built in sections, with a platform elevator that was capable of supporting an entire orchestra and either raising it to stage height or lowering it below the level of the floor. Another section of the stage supported a 3,610-pipe Möller organ that could be raised and lowered in the same

manner. Acoustics in the auditorium were also given special attention so that sounds from the stage could be projected and heard anywhere in the interior. Microphones hidden in the proscenium arch further sharpened the natural acoustics of the building.

As construction neared completion, the need for money increased. In earlier phases of the project, problems had arisen when Shriners did not honor their pledges on time, but this time their money was forthcoming. Some especially generous Shriners even provided for the mosque in their wills.³⁶

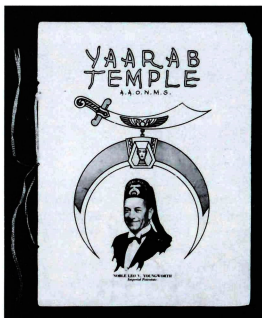
During the spring of 1929, Eve (Mrs. William K.) Fox came to Atlanta to supervise the completion of the building's exotic interior decor, including the selection of fabrics and furnishings. A few months later, Shriners occupied their quarters (although construction on the building continued throughout the year). On Christmas Day 1929, the Fox Theatre opened with a full program of singing, dancing, orchestral and organ music, a cartoon, and a feature film.³⁷ (Opening day also marked the first day of the twenty-one-year lease agreement negotiated between Yaarab Temple and Fox. The initial rental rate, according to this contract, was set at \$100,000 a year with provisions for a \$5,000 increase every seven years.³⁸)

Both the Fox Theatre opening and the new mosque were well received. A reviewer for the *Atlanta Constitution* termed the Fox opening "the finest Christmas gift that any city has been blessed with in the history of theatricals."³⁹ Another columnist, Elinor Hillyer, praised the architectural richness of the building. "The exoticism . . . has added color to the architectural panorama of Atlanta. The mosque is a symphony of the subtle differences stretching from the courts of Granada to the domes and turrets of Damascus."⁴⁰

The Shriners held their first business session in the new mosque two days after the Fox Theatre opened. At 5:00 P.M. on Thursday, December 27, 1929, in the Lounge (the skylit upstairs salon), they voted on the fifty-nine petitioners who

Cover from the dedication program of the Yaarab Temple Shrine Mosque, 1930.

Courtesy Yaarab Temple



had paid the \$119 fee and would be initiated on New Year's Eve 1929. Shriners turned out en masse to participate in the historic occasion.

Tom Law, in what was to be his last official act as potentate, ordered the uniformed parade units to report to Dr. Francis Van der Veer (marshal of the day, medical doctor, and future potentate) early on New Year's morning at Terminal Station to welcome Imperial Potentate Leo V. Youngworth, who made the train trip all the way from Los Angeles, California, to participate in the dedication ceremony. Parade units from Shrine Temples in Montgomery, Alabama; Chattanooga and Knoxville, Tennessee; Greenville, South Carolina; and from locations as far away as Ohio and Michigan, arrived to take part in the ceremonies. When the imperial potentate and his party stepped from the train at 10:00 A.M., Atlanta Shriners were there to greet them and to lead them through town to the new Shrine Mosque. At 11:00 A.M., several hundred Shriners gathered in the new auditorium to hear an address from Youngworth.⁴¹

Later in the afternoon, Shriners paraded from the mosque to Georgia Tech's Grant Field to view a charity football game between all-star teams representing the northern and southern sections of the Southern Conference. Proceeds from the game went to hospitals for crippled chil-

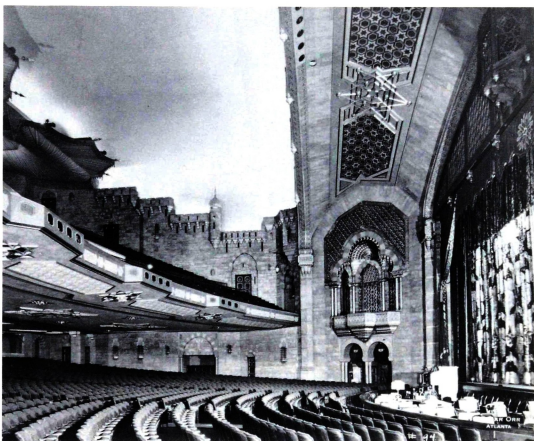
dren located in Shreveport, Louisiana; Greenville, and Atlanta. Among the players at that New Year's game in 1930 was Bobby Dodd, star player for the University of Tennessee and later the head football coach at Georgia Tech.⁴² This charity football game was the inspiration for what would later become an annual event in Atlanta. (The Scottish Rite Thanksgiving Day football game, as the event is now called, is still played in Atlanta with proceeds going to benefit Scottish Rite Children's Medical Center.)

The day's festivities concluded with the imperial potentate's formal dinner and dance in the Egyptian Ballroom, which was said to be the largest and most ornate ballroom in Atlanta. According to Recorder George Argard's entry in the minutes, the "beautiful ballroom and well-furnished lounge" were "pleasing to the eye of many hundred dancing couples."⁴³

The joy and celebration was to be short-lived, however. Two months earlier, the stock market had crashed, ushering in the Great Depression and setting in motion a chain of events that would bring thousands of corporations and organizations to their knees nationwide. Neither Yaarab Temple nor Fox proved able to weather this severe economic storm.

The first indications of trouble appeared in Henry Heinz's financial report in January 1930, when he announced that unpaid pledges and subscriptions at that time totaled \$308,000. In addition to the funds then available, the Yaarab Temple Building Company needed \$250,000 to complete payments due the contractor and the other parties dealing directly with the corporation.⁴⁴

When loans came due the following month, the divan voted to assess each Shriner forty dollars. But in April, it was decided that this action would be neither adequate nor acceptable as debts were larger than expected and the plan appeared to work a hardship on Yaarab Temple's membership, many of whom were by then unemployed.⁴⁵ Shriners by the hundreds were forced to cancel their memberships when they could not pay dues and assess-



Interior view of stage and seating at Fox Theatre, 1929.

Atlanta History Center

ments. Elsewhere throughout the nation, the pattern was repeated as Shrine membership declined by the thousands, curtailing operation of Shriners Hospital for Crippled Children by a third.⁴⁶

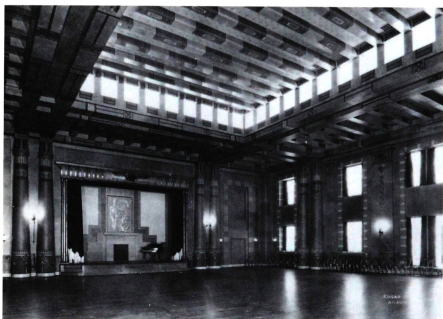
At the end of his administration in January 1931, Potentate William Fuller recapped Yaarab's worsening financial picture and the organization's efforts to hold on to their new mosque. "At first," he reported, "it was thought that the sum of \$250,000 would be sufficient to pay the balance of claims." But the sum continued to grow until they were forced to make a second mortgage bond issue for \$395,000. Even that commitment was not enough, however, to stem the tide. "We had to give our notes for another sum of about \$80,000," Fuller noted, "pledging as security the original subscriptions then uncollected."⁴⁷

Although the financial picture was clearly bleak, Fuller optimistically believed that the complicated financial dealings of his administration had saved Yaarab Temple for the Shriners.⁴⁸ Six months after the report, however, the

Trust Company of Georgia brought action against Yaarab Temple Building Company, Fox Theatres Corporation, and other investors in July 1931 to foreclose the mortgage.⁴⁹

By then the financial structure, precarious and complicated at best, depended largely upon a steady cash flow from rentals of the shops on Peachtree Street and from the Fox Theatre. But after Fox Film Company (which by then had absorbed Fox Theatres Corporation) went bankrupt in 1932, the Fox Theatre in Atlanta was forced to close after only 125 weeks of movies and stage shows.⁵⁰ Having now lost its primary sources of revenue, Yaarab Temple found it could no longer retire the bonds as they came due.

On November 12, 1932, the Trust Company of Georgia, operating as agents for the bondholders, foreclosed the mortgage on the Shrine Mosque and became the receiver of all Shrine properties that had been offered as security in 1928.⁵¹ The Fulton Superior Court ordered the Trust Company to sell the property after four weeks of advertising in the newspaper.



The Egyptian Ballroom, formerly known as the banquet hall, ca. 1929. The room was "the architects' conception of the throne room of some Pharaoh."

Atlanta History Center

On Tuesday, December 6, 1932, at 10:30 A.M., the mosque and all Shrine properties were "auctioned before the Fulton County Court House Door," as prescribed by law. The property sold for \$75,000 to the "highest and best bidder," the Theatre Holding Company, a corporation created by the bondholders for that purpose.⁵²

When the mortgage foreclosed in November 1932, all of Yaarab Temple's assets were wiped out, and \$357,000 in certificates was left outstanding. Theatre Holding Company took over the mosque in December 1932, and Yaarab Temple, its membership now reduced to less than one-third of its previous total, became a paying tenant in the mosque it had fought so hard to build and keep.⁵³

Although Yaarab Temple was no longer legally responsible for the remaining debt, many Shriners felt obligated to try to pay a percentage of the Beneficial Loan Certificates. In a good faith effort to make restitution, Yaarab Temple gave life membership to Shriners who surrendered \$100,000 face value Beneficial Loan Certificates in 1936.⁵⁴ The money collected, however, was not sufficient to retire the debt.

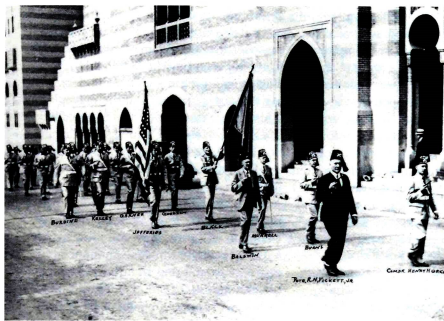
In January 1935, hopes that a new tenant would soon occupy the auditorium were raised when Lucas and Jenkins, Inc., proposed joining forces with Paramount Pictures to operate the Fox as a motion

picture theatre. One month later, on February 10, the *Atlanta Constitution* published a front page story reporting that the Shrine Mosque would be offered for sale to the City of Atlanta for use as a civic auditorium. The Yaarab Temple Divan met in a special session on February 13, 1935, to inform all parties representing the interests of Yaarab Temple of the bondholders committee's decision to sell the Shrine Mosque to the city. Following a full discussion, the divan agreed that Yaarab Temple would best be served by lending full support to the proposed sale, and a letter to the public was drafted indicating the organization's approval.⁵⁵

A number of prominent Shriners and city leaders supported the sale of the building to Atlanta. City Council Public Buildings Committee Chairman John A. White, who joined Yaarab Temple in 1920, promoted the offer, as did Chamber of Commerce President Wiley L. Moore, a member of Yaarab Temple since 1928. Mayor James L. Key, who became a Shriner in 1903, was also an early advocate of the purchase, as was future Shriner Reverend Louie D. Newton, pastor of Druid Hills Baptist Church, who envisioned the Fox as a possible site for the 1939 meeting of the Baptist World Alliance.

Attorney Harold Hirsch prepared corporation papers for a group of citizens who agreed to advance the initial \$110,000 down payment for the city. (Although the membership of this group was not revealed, it is believed that The Coca-Cola Company was the major contributor.⁵⁶) This action by "public-spirited Atlantans," Shriner Alvin L. Belle Isle explained, would allow the city to immediately take control of the Fox without having to "raise a dime to buy the property, which cost \$2,783,000."⁵⁷ Attorney R. M. Crenshaw, representing the bondholders' Theatre Holding Company, further explained that the offer allowed the city to pay the \$615,000 balance over a period of twenty-five years,⁵⁸ with the money coming from revenue generated by the mosque facilities and Fox Theatre rental, rather than from the depressed city treasury.

Despite this widespread and influential



Yaarab Temple Legion of Honor, in front of the Shriner's entrance to the Mosque, 1931.

Courtesy Yaarab Temple

support for the city's purchase of the Fox, vocal opposition surfaced almost immediately. Charging that "certain interests are manipulating and scheming to induce" city officials to buy the mosque, that interested parties are using "misleading propaganda" to regain the losses of individuals, and that the mosque had never been a financial success, the Executive Committee of the Atlanta Federation of Trades registered their opposition to the projected purchase on February 9, 1935. The federation passed resolutions pointing out that a new structure should be constructed to give employment to the unemployed, and that the mosque was inadequate to meet the needs of a city auditorium. The organization also called upon other civic organizations to join in a concerted battle to prevent the city council from voting to buy the property.⁵⁹ A month later the directors of the Atlanta Retail Merchants Association accepted the federation's challenge and announced their opposition to the purchase in a formal resolution that called upon the city council to seek a new site and build a new auditorium.⁶⁰

In response to these charges, City of Atlanta Attorney Jack Savage announced that the plan to purchase the mosque was "feasible and workable." The mosque property, including the Fox Theatre (which was now being leased by businessmen Arthur Lucas and William Jenkins

to show Paramount Pictures's films) was at that time generating only \$40,000 a year, but city tax assessors placed the appraised value of the mosque at \$1,750,000 to \$2,000,000.⁶¹

A letter from the divan dated February 14, 1935, supported the sale and explained that since the money would go to the bondholders who had earlier foreclosed on the Shrine property, Yaarab Temple could not benefit financially from the sale. Nevertheless, Yaarab Temple supported the sale because it would furnish Atlantans auditorium facilities with no expense to tax payers and, the organization hoped, allow Shriners to continue renting quarters in the mosque from a hospitable landlord.⁶²

In making the purchase proposal public, attorney Harold Hirsch was philosophical: "The original incentive behind the building of the magnificent Shrine mosque was to add to the cultural advancement of Atlanta, and now that the city is about to acquire actual ownership of the structure, that end has been attained and the nobles of Yaarab Temple will take their loss with the smile that should always lighten the countenance of a true Shriner, satisfied that their loss is the city's gain."⁶³ An editorial in the *Atlanta Journal* also supported the purchase.⁶⁴

On March 21, 1935, attorneys Harold Hirsch and Marion Smith (representing the unnamed citizens group mentioned earlier) filed a letter in Fulton County stating that if their clients were successful in their negotiations, they would form a corporation to purchase the property from the bondholders' Theatre Holding Company for \$725,000, on a bond issue and deed of trust. "The purpose of this letter," the attorneys noted, "is to authorize Jack Savage as City Attorney to submit to the Mayor and General Council proposition for deed to property."⁶⁵

As Hirsch and Smith promised, a new corporation—Mosque, Inc.—was chartered on April 10, 1935, and the attorneys filed a letter in Fulton County stating the corporation's intention to convey to the city attorney all revenues, first payment, and federal, state, and city taxes from

the Shrine Mosque.⁶⁶ Ten days before Mosque, Inc., was chartered, however, the proposed purchase offer went before the city council for a vote.⁶⁷ According to the plan outlined by attorneys, revenues from the property would be applied first to payment of any taxes that might be due, second to maintenance and operating expenses, and third to retirement of the \$725,000 purchase price. The property was also to be free of municipal taxation, and those parts of the mosque used strictly for municipal purposes would be free of state and county taxes, as well.

City Attorney Jack C. Savage had already been working out legal details with the bondholders' corporation that controlled the property,⁶⁸ but he caused some on the council to have second thoughts when he explained that in the event the city should fail to make payments from generated revenues, the status of the bondholders would be the same as anyone holding a mortgage. "They could collect," he said, "by foreclosing on the property."⁶⁹

The council was divided over the proposal. Councilman Howard C. McCutcheon, who favored the purchase, said, "Instead of calling this a purchase, we should refer to it as 'accepting a gift.'" But Councilman John M. Owen said the transaction "is so obviously an effort to evade the law that it can easily be construed as an effort to create a debt in contravention of legal limitations." John A. White declared that the city had "everything to gain and nothing to lose," and he added that all opposition must be "selfish or political." Alderman J. Sid Tiller said the "income of the property in 1934 was not sufficient to pay operating expenses, much less retire any debt." And Savage admitted that the plan was of questionable legality although it had the best chance of being sustained in court of any plan suggested.⁷⁰

After stormy debate, the council voted twenty-one to thirteen to take full control of the Shrine Mosque and Fox Theatre property for a municipal auditorium "as quickly as the necessary deeds, contracts, and other documents can be drawn and executed"—a period estimated to take "two or three weeks."⁷¹ The Public

Buildings and Grounds Committee would control the mosque property for the city, together with ex-officio members James S. Floyd representing the bondholders; S. F. Boykin, representing citizens underwriting the cash payment; and the mayor.⁷² This super-visory group was to be called the Shrine Mosque Commission. Yaarab Social Club became the first applicant to the City of Atlanta for space in the Atlanta mosque.⁷³

Three days after the council voted to purchase the mosque, W. Brown Hayes, chairman of the citizens' committee that led opposition to the deal, announced his decision not to bring an injunction suit to test the legality of the plan but to "stand by and give it time to hang itself."⁷⁴ But that did not stop three other taxpayers from filing a lawsuit to set aside the mosque purchase as "illegal, null, and void."⁷⁵ Reasoning that a vote of the electorate was necessary for such a transaction and that the lack of taxes for 1935 constituted a deficit in municipal revenue, the plaintiffs charged that the purchase of the mosque constituted an illegal action since it would cause the city to incur a new debt.

In the meantime, Mosque, Inc., purchased the Shrine Mosque from the bondholders' Theatre Holding Company on April 19 for \$110,000 cash and \$615,000 in bonds, naming Trust Company of Georgia as agent.⁷⁶ On the same day, an agreement was signed between Mosque, Inc., and the City of Atlanta whereby all Shrine Mosque property was accepted by the city under conditions and terms agreed upon on April 1. The document was signed by Alexander Stephens Clay as president of Mosque, Inc., and M. E. Kilpatrick as secretary.⁷⁷ Mosque, Inc., and Fulton National Bank of Atlanta, as owners of the property, then issued bonds of \$110,000, securing income from rent and stores to pay the 1935 taxes. The mortgage was to be paid in six years, with bonds set to mature in 1937.⁷⁸

Arthur Lucas and William Jenkins, who had leased the Fox Theatre from Mosque, Inc., were told on May 1, 1935, to vacate the premises so that the City of Atlanta could take control of the property in the

fall. City officials, however, anxious to continue receiving income from the theatre, quickly effected a new five-year lease with the motion picture theatre operators who continued to operate the Fox both as a movie theatre and as a venue for concerts, plays, and musicals.⁷⁹ (The Atlanta Music Club in association with the Atlanta Philharmonic Orchestra, for example, engaged the theatre for the 1935–1936 Civic Concert season, which featured violinist Fritz Kreisler, the National Symphony Orchestra, operetta artists Nelson Eddy and Helen Jepson, and opera star Grace Moore.) The mosque's other primary tenant, Yaarab Temple, signed a thirteen-month lease with the city so that it could continue to use the building for its headquarters.⁸⁰

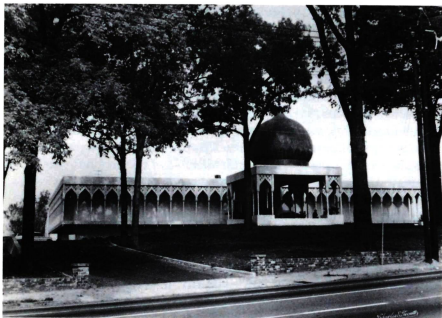
By January 1936, with a pending lawsuit challenging the legality of their actions and with indications that the theatre could not be self-sustaining, the city council attempted to terminate its agreement with Mosque, Inc. In his annual message the first week in 1936, Mayor Key projected that the mosque would run a \$30,000 deficit for the new year (not including taxes that would amount to an additional \$9,000). As a result, he recommended that unless the bondholders and underwriters could come up with a proposition to make the mosque property self-liquidating by January 31, 1936—the cut-off date for 1935 taxes—the city would “turn the property back to the bondholders and underwriters and deal with it as any other privately owned property in the city.”⁸¹ The city would thus be in a position to attach the property for back taxes.

On January 29, 1936, the Mayor called a special session of the council, and that body voted without dissent to issue a quit claim deed returning the property to Mosque, Inc.⁸² City Attorney Jack Savage delivered the quit claim deed and all other papers pertaining to the property to M. E. Kilpatrick, secretary of Mosque, Inc., but Kilpatrick promptly returned them saying he could not take responsibility for accepting them until the bondholders could meet and take action. At that point an

employee of the city law department hurried the papers to the courthouse and filed the deed, saw it recorded, and returned receipts for the transaction to the city attorney.⁸³ Savage attributed their haste to a stipulation in the law that made the holder of the title on January 31 responsible for the taxes. Technically, since the Theatre Holding Company held title on January 31 of the previous year, the council's action placed the Shrine property back on the tax digests as private property, allowing the city to collect back taxes for 1935 as well as taxes due in 1936.

With the Fox back in the hands of the underwriters, Lucas and Jenkins signed a new contract with Mosque, Inc., on December 1, 1936, leasing the “theatre building known as ‘Fox Theatre’” for purposes of operating a “high class motion picture theatre.” The new lease agreement was scheduled to run for twenty years at \$30,000 a year.⁸⁴ Mosque, Inc., however, reserved the right to sell the property or any of the fixtures or equipment at any time.⁸⁵

Yaarab Temple also continued its presence in the mosque during the 1930s, with the Oriental Band sponsoring popular Saturday night dances in the Egyptian Ballroom.⁸⁶ But by 1936, the Temple was struggling under the heavy burden of a \$340,000 indebtedness to Beneficial Loan Certificate holders and annual expenditures of \$3,200 for utilities, rent, and maintenance in their leased quarters in the mosque.⁸⁷ Feeling crushed by the rising debt, Shriner leaders persuaded twenty-nine-year-old Wilbur Fisk Glenn, an Atlantic Steel executive and member of Yaarab Temple since 1930, to contact Mosque, Inc., and ask for rent reduction.⁸⁸ As a result, when the lease expired a year later, Mosque, Inc., offered Yaarab Temple use of the Shrine quarters, including the Egyptian Ballroom, upstairs lounge, and kitchen, four times during the year without charge except for utilities. A. S. Clay, president of Mosque, Inc., offered the rent-free arrangement, as he explained, so that Yaarab Temple would “use its influence by their occupancy as a fraternal organization in holding the tax assessments



Current Yaarab Shrine Temple, 400 Ponce de Leon Avenue, ca. 1965.

Atlanta History Center

on the mosque to a reasonable basis."⁸⁹ The Shriners signed the two-year lease with Mosque, Inc., on September 1, 1937.⁹⁰

On June 1, 1939, Yaarab Temple was forced to vacate its upstairs meeting space when Mosque, Inc., rented the skylit lounge to Georgia Theaters Service Corporation for office space, together with various other offices on the second and third floor.⁹¹ Deprived of meeting space in the lounge, the Shriners confined their business meetings to the Fox basement and remained tenants at will during the years of World War II when membership again declined. The Temple held its last meeting in the Spanish Room of the mosque in 1949, and their connection with the Fox Theatre ended officially in December of that year. By then Yaarab Temple had purchased the old Standard Club at 400 Ponce de Leon Avenue, the site of the present mosque.

The passage of years also took their toll on the Fox Theatre. As television altered entertainment habits and the growth patterns of the city changed, the Fox became unable to compete. Finally, after a period of showing low-budget films, John H. Stembler, president of Mosque, Inc., announced in 1974 his intention to close the Fox. "It is not economically feasible to continue to operate the Fox Theatre," he said. "We will close our doors December 31, even if nobody

has bought the Fox."⁹²

The story of the Fox Theatre since Atlanta Landmarks, Inc., acquired it during the "Save the Fox"⁹³ campaign in 1974 and restored it to its 1929 condition is well known. When the Fox was saved from the wrecker's ball and eventually restored,⁹⁴ Shriners shared the enthusiasm of Governor George Busbee, who referred to the old theatre as "one of our state's most important cultural resources, an architecturally significant structure that should be preserved for many future generations to enjoy."⁹⁵ Shriners, like most Atlantans, also felt gratified when the United States Department of the Interior designated the Fox Theatre a National Historic Landmark in 1976.

When Yaarab Temple turned one hundred years old, the Shriners again returned to their former home for a one-night centennial celebration held on December 14, 1989. Entertainment included a live show on the Fox Theatre stage, and a reception and dance in the Egyptian Ballroom where the imperial potentate had been the guest of honor. Wilbur Fisk Glenn, who had been potentate in 1939 when Yaarab Temple celebrated its fiftieth anniversary, participated in the rededication ceremonies of Yaarab Temple during the celebration.⁹⁶

Today, Atlanta's Yaarab Temple, with its current membership of more than 10,000 Shrine Masons, is one of 190 Shrine Temples located in the United States, Canada, Mexico, and the Republic of Panama. Together these Temples constitute the Ancient Arabic Order of the Nobles of the Mystic Shrine for North America, a fraternity whose membership has included presidents (Warren G. Harding, Franklin D. Roosevelt, Harry S. Truman, Gerald Ford), military leaders (John J. Pershing, Omar N. Bradley, Jonathan Wainwright, Douglas MacArthur, Mark Clark), statesmen (Barry Goldwater, Canadian Prime Minister John G. Diefenbaker, Thomas E. Dewey, the last King of Hawaii), motion picture celebrities (Cecil B. DeMille, Clark Gable, Will Rogers, Red Skelton, John Wayne, Roy Rogers) and numerous others, including

Jack Dempsey, Virgil Grissom, Buzz Aldrin, Norman Vincent Peale, John Phillip Sousa, Sigmund Romberg, Irving Berlin, Paul Whiteman, and Ty Cobb.

The past and present membership of Atlanta's Yaarab Temple also contains some names of note, including former governors Joe Frank Harris, Lester Maddox, and Herman Talmadge, as well as Agriculture Commissioner Tommy Irvin, Fulton County District Attorney Lewis Slaton, former Fulton Commission Chairman Charlie Brown, Atlanta Falcons football team owner Rankin Smith, National Chemical President Gene Bracewell, former State Senator and clothing manufacturer Lamar R. Plunkett, a few state legislators, and numerous other leaders.

But the makeup of the organization is dramatically changing. When Shriners occupied the building that houses the Fox Theatre, the vast majority of them resided in Atlanta and its suburbs. Their strength lay in the parade units of Yaarab Temple, such as a marching unit (Patrol), band unit, horse riders unit (Mounted Patrol), chanters unit (singers), and so on. Today the actual number of Shriners residing within the city and its immediate suburbs is minuscule compared to the membership located in the north Georgia jurisdiction.

Both Masonry and the Shrine are suffering a dramatic decline in membership. According to information supplied by the Imperial Shrine headquarters, the Shrine of North America's membership peaked in 1959 with a total of 4.1 million Shriners. Today there are fewer than 680,000, and the average member's age is sixty-six. Yaarab Temple in Atlanta seems to have fared better than most, but its strength today is diffused over a larger metropolitan area and the Atlanta presence continues to decline.

Yaarab Temple no longer has any official ties to the old Shrine Mosque, and few of its members are probably aware of the role their early leaders played in bringing into being what is now known as the Fox Theatre. If it weren't for the vision and dedication of these early leaders, as well as those who helped save and restore the

Fox Theatre in the 1970s, Atlanta would never have gained or retained one of its most popular and distinctive cultural treasures.

NOTES

1. *Atlanta Constitution*, January 1, 1930.
2. Yaarab Temple *Minutes*, December 17, 1919. The lot on Ivy Street measured one hundred by two hundred feet and cost \$40,000, while the one on Baker Street measured forty-five by one hundred feet and cost \$19,000.
3. Yaarab Temple *Minutes*, January 21, 1925. *The City Builder*, March 1922, 7. The Shriners exchanged their downtown lots and made a cash payment of \$89,000 for the property.
4. The Lyric Theatre had been headquarters when Atlanta hosted its first Imperial Shrine Convention in 1914. The theatre was replaced in 1926 by the Atlanta Athletic Club. Today the site is a parking lot across the street from the Macy's parking deck.
5. Yaarab Temple *Minutes*, May 18, 1925.
6. Adams also promised to erect a bronze wall in "one of the central rooms" on which the names of all those who lent money to the building fund would be inscribed." [Albert S. Adams] *The Magic of Work Well Done* (Atlanta: Yaarab Temple, 1926), 9. No evidence remains of these inscriptions, perhaps because Adams died shortly after the campaign ended. According to the Yaarab Temple *Minutes* for March 1926, they voted to raise initiation fees, setting half apart in a trust fund to pay beneficiaries of the Beneficial Loan Certificates, and they designated the Trust Company of Georgia to hold the trust fund and prescribe the method of paying beneficiaries.
7. *The Magic of Work Well Done*, 10.
8. *Ibid.*
9. *The City Builder*, December 1925, 10.
10. *Ibid.*, 10, 41. The basement would provide space for a drill hall, showers, personal lockers, and sleeping rooms for out-of-town Shriners and official guests. A banquet hall would seat more than a thousand people and on short notice could be converted into a large ballroom.
11. *Ibid.*, 10. The Ansley Hotel at Forsyth and Luckie Streets, built in 1913 and renovated and renamed the Dinkler-Plaza in 1953, was later replaced by a parking lot.
12. Yaarab Temple *Minutes*, January 16, 1930.
13. Yaarab Temple *Minutes*, December 16, 1925. The building committee consisted of Chairman Charles A. Bowen, Henry C. Heinz, James S. Floyd, Thomas C. Law, William A. Fuller, Frank M. Berry, William C. Wardlaw, and George E. Argard.
14. *The City Builder*, March 1928, 48. The list of names composing the ten-member corporation reads like a 1920s *Who's Who in Atlanta*: Chairman Henry C. Heinz, past potentate, vice-president of Citizens and Southern Bank, treasurer of Dinkler Hotels Corporation, and international president of Kiwanis; Treasurer James S. Floyd, vice-president Atlanta and Lowry National Bank; Secretary George E. Argard, recorder [business adminis-

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- trator] of Yaarab Temple; Thomas C. Law, potentate of Yaarab Temple (1926-1930), president of Law & Company, Industrial Chemists; William A. Fuller, attorney and member of Yaarab Temple's governing divan; W. Bayne Gibson, past potentate (1922-1923), president of Bayne Gibson Mortgage Company; Charles A. Bowen, past potentate (1924-1925), representative of Travelers Insurance Company; Frank M. Berry, cashier of Fourth National Bank; and William C. Wardlaw, vice-president of Trust Company of Georgia.
15. Yaarab Temple *Minutes*, March 8, 1926. The board of trustees was composed of Albert S. Adams, W. Bayne Gibson, Charles A. Bowen, Henry C. Heinz, James S. Floyd, George E. Argard, William A. Fuller, Frank M. Berry, and Thomas C. Law. Later when Bert Adams became ill, he was replaced on the board by Joseph S. Shaw for the unexpired term. See Yaarab Temple *Minutes*, January 19, 1927.
16. Yaarab Temple *Minutes*, August 2, 1926. The 19-foot strip running from Peachtree to Cypress Streets was purchased from Corrie Hoyt Brown for \$28,500, and the 68- by 145-foot tract at Kimball and Cypress Streets cost \$25,000.
17. *Atlanta's Lasting Landmarks* (Atlanta: Atlanta Urban Design Commission, 1987), 103.
18. Henry Woodhead, "A Fading Paradise on Peachtree," *Atlanta Journal-Constitution Magazine*, June 16, 1974, 18.
19. Lydia V. Miller, "Fox Architect," *Atlanta Journal-Constitution*, September 8, 1974, 5.
20. Preston S. Stevens, *Building a Firm* (Atlanta: [Privately printed], 1979), 68.
21. *Atlanta Constitution*, January 26, 1930.
22. *Ibid.* Marye described the interior of the two large elevators that gave access to the three tiers of lounges as being furnished with embossed panels to give the effect of Moroccan leather. The "high speed elevators" in each of the two dressing room wings flanking the stage gave quick access to the six tiers of dressing rooms, and the twenty dressing rooms were equipped with fireproof steel dressing tables, clothes racks, chairs, and with specially-arranged full-length mirrors. "These elevators also give access to the basement where are located about thirty rooms for the musicians, musical library, scenic artists, ushers, and other departments of the theatre staff."
23. *Ibid.*
24. In a letter to Potentate Thomas C. Law, dated January 20, 1928, Fox Theatres Corporation General Counsel Saul E. Rogers wrote: "I am approaching our project in Atlanta with the highest hopes, not only that we shall have a theatre surpassed by none in that part of the country but that our interests shall be merged with the pride entertained by Yaarab Temple in the success of the enterprise of which they are sponsor."
25. Yaarab Temple *Minutes*, December 12, 1927.
26. Yaarab Temple *Minutes*, January 18, 1928.
27. *Ibid.*
28. *The City Builder*, March 1928.
29. *Ibid.*, 4.
30. *Ibid.*, 5.
31. *Ibid.*, 47.
32. *Basharat*, December 1949, 24. Superintendent of mosque masonry construction Robert N. Eaves, a member of Yaarab Temple since 1921, actually set the cornerstone in place while the Grand Master officiated.
33. Yaarab Temple *Minutes*, January 16, 1930. Leases commenced on the following shops between December 15, 1928, and April 1, 1929: Blue Goose Gift Shop; Jacob's Pharmacy; Buchannan's; West View Florist; Anderson & Megee; Wellborn, Ship & Disoway; and Kohler and Co.
34. Yaarab Temple *Minutes*, October 24, 1928.
35. "What Price Criticism!," *Southern Architect and Building News*, May 1928, 61. Alger's letter defended his firm against a criticism by the editor of *Southern Architect and Building News* the previous February that the Shrine Mosque violated "propriety of location in architecture" and referred to its planned construction as "the most brutal assault we can possibly imagine to the citizens of this city who do possess any spark of the artistic within them" (32). The editor concluded his criticism by writing "the poor architect has been sacrificed upon the altar for the crime of just another overpowering building committee." In response, Alger wrote in the May issue: "The Building Committee worked hard and in the utmost harmony with the Georgia Chapter of the A.I.A. [American Institute of Architects] to secure a real solution of their problem" (61). The "problem" was how to harmonize the Moorish architectural style for the Shrine Mosque with the classical design of the neighboring Georgian Terrace Hotel and Ponce de Leon Apartments. Alger countered that the materials his firm chose would harmonize "both in texture and color" with the surrounding buildings. "In fact," he added, "such was the requirement of the competition program."
36. Yaarab Temple *Minutes*, January 16, 1929. The Shriners singled out four major contributors to the building fund in January 1929, all of whom had died before seeing the finished structure: furniture magnate Amos G. Rhodes died in 1928; Life of Georgia founder John N. McEachern Sr., a Shriner since 1902, died in 1928; hotel manager Louis J. Dinkler, died in 1928; Hungarian-born founder of Rich's department store Morris Rich died in 1928; and Carter Electric Company president Lester L. Shivers, a Shriner since 1912, died in 1927.
37. Norman Shavin and Bruce Galphin, *Atlanta: Triumph of a People*, 231. Photos of the Fox Theatre interior appear on pp. 231-233 and the exterior on p. 230. See also *Atlanta Constitution Intown Extra*, Feb. 12, 1987, 3E. On that cold Christmas Day of 1929, people lined up around the block in drizzling rain for one of the five thousand seats at each of the five performances. Doors opened at 1:30 P.M. with a variety of entertainment that included a community sing-along led by master of ceremonies Don Wilkins to music on the 3,610-pipe "Mighty" Möller organ when it ascended from a pit with Don's wife, Iris Vinings Wilkins, at the keyboard. The entertainment included Italian-born Enrico Leide (a member of Yaarab Temple since 1923) conducting the Fox Grand Orchestra in Elgar's *This Shrine of Beauty*; a program of dancing girls (Fanchon and Marco's "Sunkist Beauties") kicking and swaying through five performances of *By the Beautiful Sea*; a showing of the proto-Mickey Mouse cartoon *Steamboat Willie*; Fox

Movietone News; and the feature film *Salute*, a West Point romance starring George O'Brien, Helen Chandler, and Stepin Fetchit. Tickets cost between fifteen and seventy-five cents.

38. Yaarab Temple *Minutes*, January 16, 1930. Total value of the leases on the Fox Theatre and the shops was listed at \$2,446,670.50. Actual cost of constructing the mosque was listed at \$2,228,670.50.

39. As quoted in the *Atlanta Constitution Intown Extra*, Feb. 12, 1987, 3E.

40. *Atlanta Journal Magazine*, February 16, 1930.

41. Afterward, Potentate Tom C. Law asked all Shriners who had been among the charter members of Yaarab Temple forty years earlier to come to the stage and be introduced. The surviving charter members were George B. Saunders (#5), Henry M. Robinson (#24), Matt Torbert (#28), Thomas H. Morgan (#38), Frank West (#43), Joseph K. Orr (#64), and Forrest Adair (#94). Longtime member E. G. Earnest (#56), who was then past eighty-five, was unable to attend.

42. *Atlanta Constitution*, January 2, 1930. Major Bob Neyland, head coach at the University of Tennessee, coached the victorious northern team, while Charles Bachman of the University of Florida, coached the southern team. According to sports editor Ed Danforth, the idea of the game originated with Nobles Bob Gregg, Tom Law, and Bob Wardlaw two years earlier when it was endorsed by the southern conference.

43. Yaarab Temple *Minutes*, January 1, 1930. According to building plans, the "mechanically ventilated" ballroom measured eighty feet wide, one hundred feet long, and forty feet high.

44. Yaarab Temple *Minutes*, January 16, 1930. In a mutual effort for survival in 1930, Lowe's Theatre Corporation set up a joint management with the Fox Theatre officials to stabilize finances, but the rapidly degenerating economic structure prompted Lowe's to pull out on August 1, 1932, to avoid bankruptcy when the Fox organization failed.

45. During 1933, 50 percent of the Atlanta work force was out of work, according to *The City Builder*, March 1934, 4.

46. Orville Findley Rush, *Parade to Glory* (Privately Printed by The Imperial Council, A.A.O.N.M.S., an Iowa Corporation, revised 1980), 231. During 1931 a total of twenty thousand Nobles were suspended nationally for nonpayment of dues, and forty-five thousand were suspended in 1933.

47. Yaarab Temple *Minutes*, January 21, 1931.

48. Yaarab Temple *Minutes*, January 21, 1931. Said Fuller, "[in] the face of apparently insuperable obstacles, and notwithstanding predictions from bankers, businessmen, and lawyers, that we were bound to fail, that we could not save the Temple, . . . we carried on and the Temple is here today, is ours and is saved." But, he must have sensed failure when he cautioned: "There can be no such disaster [as losing the mosque] if the members remain loyal to the Temple and do their part."

49. Fulton County, Georgia. *Deed Book* 1492, 89.

50. Before the summer ended, Shriner Enrico Leide, who had conducted the theatre's Fox Grand Orchestra on opening day, was appointed manager when the Fox

reopened as a motion picture theatre in August.

51. Fulton County, Georgia. *Deed Book* 1492, 89, and *Atlanta Journal*, November 13, 1932. There seemed to be no interruption, however, in Shrine activities at the mosque or in the theatre's offerings. On the day following the mortgage foreclosure, the newspaper announced that the Fox Theatre management would host Shriners and their families at a matinee party the following Thursday, "according to a joint announcement by Illustrious Potentate Richard N. Fickett Jr., and Enrico Leide, managing director of the theatre." The newspaper article also announced a ladies' bridge party and the fall initiation ceremonial for November 25 "in the mosque and main auditorium," and a costume party on November 30. The article ended with the promise of other parties during the fall.

52. Fulton County, Georgia. *Deed Book* 1492, 89, and *Deed Book* 1451, 257. See also Yaarab Temple *Minutes*, January 18, 1933: "Whereas the assets of Yaarab Temple Building Company have been purchased by the bondholders, acting through a corporation [Theatre Holding Company] organized for that purpose, and negotiations for the re-purchase of the Shrine Mosque properties are now pending, create a corporation known as 'Yaarab Temple Corporation' for the purpose of acquiring and holding title to properties."

53. Hiram R. Romans, "Half a Century of Shrinedom in Atlanta," *Atlanta Constitution Sunday Magazine*, December 3, 1939.

54. Henry Cundell, *History of Yaarab Temple*, (Atlanta, Yaarab Temple, n.d.), 69.

55. Yaarab Temple *Dicran Minutes*, February 13, 1935.

56. *Atlanta Journal*, January 31, 1936. While the names of the underwriters who later formed Mosque, Inc., are not recorded officially, "reports at City Hall" said "The Coca-Cola Company put up \$75,000, while other contributors, "listed in the order of the size of their advances, were reported as the First National Bank of Atlanta, the Citizens & Southern National Bank, Fulton National Bank and Trust Company of Georgia, the Retail Credit Company, R. DeWitt King, Simon Selig, Wiley L. Moore, and A. L. Belle Isle."

57. *Atlanta Constitution*, February 10, 1935.

58. Ibid. The original offer was for repayment in twenty years.

59. Ibid.

60. *Atlanta Journal*, March 4, 1935.

61. Ibid.

62. Yaarab Temple *Dicran Minutes*, February 13, 1935, Schedule A.

63. *Atlanta Constitution*, February 10, 1935.

64. *Atlanta Journal*, February 17, 1935.

65. Fulton County, Georgia. *Deed Book* 1550, 378.

66. Ibid. According to official records of the State of Delaware, Mosque, Inc., filed a Certificate of Incorporation on April 10, 1935, and filed a Certificate of Dissolution on July 3, 1975. Directors at the time of dissolution were listed as Charles J. Iacona, John L. Huff, Frederick G. Storey, and John H. Stembler, all of Atlanta.

67. *Atlanta Journal*, April 2, 1935.

68. *Atlanta Journal*, February 27, 1935.

69. *Atlanta Journal*, April 2, 1935.

70. Ibid.

71. Ibid. The article identifies the way each council member voted.

72. *Atlanta Journal*, February 1, 1936.

73. *Atlanta Journal*, April 15, 1935. Mayor Key received and transmitted to the city council the first formal application for space in the Shrine Mosque in advance of that structure's becoming "the municipal auditorium." Shriner George Starr Peck asked for a lease on the lounge (upstairs salon), which it had been occupying for months, and the roof space over the Peachtree entrance for use as a restaurant, with exclusive right to sell food and drinks in the building. The news article stated that deeds and contracts transferring the mosque to the city government "are now being drawn," and it further noted that the council had already ratified all details of the agreement with bondholders whereby Atlanta would acquire the property. The Yaarab Social Club continued to offer dances, even after Mosque, Inc., became sole owner. For example, an ad in the *Atlanta Journal* on January 6, 1936, announced a dance at the Shrine Mosque for Tuesday, January 7, from 9:30 P.M. to 1:30 A.M., featuring Buddy Rogers Orchestra. Admission was \$2.20 per couple, and tickets could be purchased at Davison's, Rich's, the Junior Chamber of Commerce, or "at the Mosque door."

74. *Atlanta Journal*, April 4, 1935.

75. *Atlanta Journal*, April 28, 1935. The legal action was filed by attorney Robert M. Cook and brought by taxpayers C. H. York, Mrs. L. R. Swan, and A. Solomon against the city, and against Marion Smith and Harold Hirsch as attorneys for Mosque, Inc.

76. Fulton County, Georgia. *Deed Book* 1549, 438.

77. Fulton County, Georgia. *Deed Book* 1550, 377.

78. Fulton County, Georgia. *Deed Book* 1537, 590.

79. *Atlanta Journal*, April 28, 1935. The Egyptian Ballroom remained a source of revenue as well. A news item in the *Atlanta Journal* on March 20, 1935, for example, announced that the forty-fifth annual Purim ball of the United Hebrew School would be held in the Egyptian Ballroom of the Shrine Mosque.

80. Yaarab Temple *Dixan Minutes*, August 14, 1935. According to the contract, Yaarab Temple would pay \$250 a month and have exclusive use of the ballroom and kitchen twelve times a year without additional charge.

81. *Atlanta Journal*, January 7, 1936.

82. *Atlanta Journal*, January 30, 1936.

83. *Atlanta Journal*, January 31, 1936. See Fulton

County, Georgia. *Deed Book* 1586, 254.

84. Fulton County, Georgia. *Deed Book* 1588, 459.

85. *Atlanta Journal*, December 9, 1936.

86. In January 1930 the Oriental Band Unit of Yaarab Temple had subleased the Egyptian Ballroom from Yaarab Temple for \$5,000 for the remaining fifty Saturday nights of the year, and for the next six years their weekly dances made enough profit to pay for the unit's travel expenses to Imperial and Southeastern Shrine conventions and other trips. Some people, including the daughter of Fox Theatre architect Oliver Vinour, recall the popular Egyptian Ballroom dances with the big name bands during the 1930s: "I would certainly want to make a special trip to Atlanta to visit ...

what for me represents many happy memories, not only of the [Fox] theatre itself but of college dances which I attended with my husband in the ballroom of the Shriners' Mosque before we were married." Lydia V. Miller, Bergenfield, N. J., in a letter to the editor, "Fox Architect," *Atlanta Journal/Constitution*, September 8, 1974.

87. Yaarab Temple *Minutes*, June 3, 1936.

88. Yaarab Temple *Dixan Minutes*, June 9, 1936.

89. Yaarab Temple *Dixan Minutes*, June 7, 1937.

90. Yaarab Temple *Minutes*, October 20, 1937. When the lease expired, the Shriners renewed it for \$100 a month, with the option for renewing an additional year at \$125 per month in 1941. Yaarab Temple *Minutes*, October 9, 1939.

91. Fulton County, Georgia. *Deed Book* 1747, 135-138.

92. *The Great Speckled Bird*, July 22, 1974.

93. The Fox was saved on February 28, 1978, when the \$1.8 million mortgage jointly held by a consortium of five Atlanta banks was paid off, in full, by Atlanta Landmarks, Inc., following four years of fund raising. The theatre had closed on January 2, 1975, after showing its last movie, *The Klansman*, starring Richard Burton.

94. In July 1974, when Southern Bell announced its decision to demolish the Fox and erect its headquarters on the site, a group of concerned citizens formed Atlanta Landmarks, Inc., and persuaded the city to impose a moratorium on issuing the demolition permit. The delay allowed them time to assemble a plan for purchasing the Fox from Mosque, Inc. Public support and substantial anonymous donations provided necessary funds to save the Fox by February 28, 1978, when the \$1.8 million mortgage was paid in full.

95. William Schemmel, *The Fabulous Fox At 50* (Atlanta: Perry Communications, 1979), 32.

96. Ibid., 33. When Yaarab Temple celebrated its fiftieth anniversary on December 8, 1939, the membership stood at 1,884. Atlanta Mayor William B. Hartsfield proclaimed "Shrine Day" for the city, and former-Governor John M. Slaton addressed his fellow Shriners at a dinner honoring the one hundred Shriners who had been members of Yaarab Temple the longest. One surviving charter member from 1889 attended the special event. A decade before Yaarab Temple celebrated its centennial at its old mosque home, the Fox Theatre celebrated its fiftieth anniversary in December 1979 with special programs throughout the month. The celebration included a concert by soprano Beverly Sills, a concert by clarinetist Benny Goodman, the annual Parade of Carolers, a Fiftieth Anniversary Party featuring a 750-pound cake, the annual *Nutcracker* performance of the Atlanta Ballet, country-western singer Waylon Jennings, an architectural tour of the building, and the traditional New Year's Eve party.